

# From Pre-Service to Novice: Unraveling EFL Teachers' Professional Identity Transformation through the Lens of Critical Incident Technique

Fidelis Elleny Averina<sup>1\*</sup>, Paulus Kuswandono<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Sanata Dharma University, Indonesia

<sup>1\*</sup> [fideliselleny@gmail.com](mailto:fideliselleny@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup> [kus@usd.ac.id](mailto:kus@usd.ac.id)

## Abstract

While it has been widely acknowledged by previous researchers that professional identity transformation was considered to be one of the most susceptible stages for EFL teachers, very few of them analysed it through the lens of critical incident technique in the Indonesian context. Thus, to fill the gap in the literature, this study aimed to explore novice EFL teachers' identity in the pre-service stage and the ways they mediated the tensions encountered during their early careers to transform their professional identity. Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was employed as a method in this study by utilizing an open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interview to gather the data and ensure triangulation. Eight novice EFL teachers from different regions in Indonesia were purposefully selected as the participants. The result revealed that the teacher as a facilitator became the most dominant imagined professional identity possessed by the participants in the pre-service stage followed by the teacher as a moral guide and the teacher as a language expert. As for participants' designated identity in the novice stage, five salient notions were identified. They are the teacher as an adaptive agent, becoming an authentic and a genuine teacher, the teacher's sense of belonging within the community of practice, embracing the teacher's vulnerability, and the teacher as an autonomous lifelong learner.

**Keywords:** *EFL, critical incident, designated identity, imagined identity, teacher identity transformation*

## Introduction

Becoming a professional, passionate, and highly qualified teacher who is capable to face the tensions and complexities of the educational dynamics and shifts requires the teacher to continuously form, transform, and reform one's professional identity. It is essential since the process of teacher professional identity construction is a non-linear, complex, dynamic, fluctuating, and context-dependent process as it might alter positively or negatively throughout a teacher's career due to the change and tangible interplay among agency, emotion, belief, and self-efficacy in the context of workplace culture, socio-economic situation, and policy (Day, 2018). In fact, the complexity of identity construction escalates especially during the transitional stage from pre-service to novice. Wang (2020) argued that the transitional stage from being a pre-service teacher to becoming a real teacher with full professional responsibility is considered to be one of the most susceptible stages in forming a professional identity. This is in line with Alsup (2008) who argued that "the first few years

of teaching are even more difficult than remaining in the profession as an experienced teacher” (p. 21).

During the early years of their teaching careers, novice EFL teachers frequently experience reality shock, emotional labour, and energy-draining educational tensions that might lead them to disengage their professional identity (Jiang, Yuan, & Yu, 2021; Wijaya, 2022). Furthermore, as they take up full responsibility for teaching, these beginning teachers are pushed and pulled between their personal beliefs and expectations about teaching, while at the same time they have to accommodate the demands and policies of the new educational environment. This is congruent with the findings of current research in which novice EFL teachers were reported to undergo emotional distress coming from personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors (Diasti, 2021); struggle in maintaining self-efficacy in teaching (Lomi & Mbato, 2020); and experience emotional challenges in adapting to their new role. In addition, novice EFL teachers were also found to grapple with the identity crisis during their early careers and strive to overcome the tensions of the new environment (Tao & Gao, 2017; Widiati, Suryati, & Hayati, 2018; Xu & Fan, 2017).

The conflicts and constraints encountered by the novice EFL teachers force them to negotiate their imagined identity by transforming it into the designated identity to fit with the new environment. According to Xu (2013), imagined identity can be defined as one’s preconceived notion of what is perceived to be ideal and good in the teaching and learning context. This imagined identity is constructed through the influence of novice teachers’ past experience as students and their past training experience in the teaching department accompanied by the lack of authentic teaching experience in the real educational context (Yang, Shu, & Yin, 2021). However, this idealistic view is usually challenged by the tensions found in the real workforce. As a consequence, their beliefs about what it takes to become a teacher and what teaching-learning should be might be shifted. These tensions can be mediated through teachers’ active participation in forming a designated identity by negotiating and adjusting their personal identity with the new situated context (Sudtho & Singhasiri, 2017).

Previous studies on teacher identity transformation have highlighted the importance of exploring the identity shift from pre-service to novice teachers. More attempts were conducted to acquire a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teachers’ identity construction process and unravel the characteristics of identity transformation from a more developmental perspective. A study conducted by Jiang et al., (2021) in Macau revealed that teachers’ identity transformation from imagined identity to designated identity in the novice stage was not a linear trajectory as it underwent a series of processes including “renegotiation, evolution, establishment and sustainment” (p. 20). Furthermore, a study conducted by Wang (2020) in China found some constraints that influenced the first-year EFL teachers’ identity shift. Those constraints came from institutional structures, policies, and norms. Meanwhile, slightly different research was conducted by Yang et al. (2021) in which they investigated the complex interplay of emotional trajectories of EFL teachers in China along with the dynamic development of their professional identity across their career spans. The result highlighted the impacts of reflecting emotional experiences on professional identity development through the process of meaning-making.

In the Indonesian context, a study conducted by Wijaya (2022) revealed that novice EFL teachers' proactive engagement as active agents to mediate between their personal beliefs and institution's belief, teachers' participation in the community of practice to have mutual understanding with other colleagues, and teachers' willingness to keep transforming their professional identity in the face of tensions were found to strengthen their professional identity and to remain faithful in their profession. Another study conducted by Wijaya and Kuswandono (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of reflection with the critical incident theory (CIT) framework as a form of Teacher Professional Development (TPD). The results showed that reflecting CIs could become a strong foundation for EFL teachers to develop themselves professionally to the fullest. Furthermore, a similar study concerning the role of CIT in constructing Public Senior High School English teachers' identity development conducted by Putri and Kuswandono (2020) revealed that when the teachers were engaged in the meaning-making process by reflecting on the critical incidents that they experienced during their teaching careers, they could develop their professional identity more strongly.

Despite the growing body of research on teacher identity transformation and development (Jiang et al., 2021; Putri & Kuswandono, 2020; Wang, 2020; Wijaya & Kuswandono, 2019; Wijaya, 2022; Yang et al., 2021), very few of them analysed it through the lens of critical incident technique in the Indonesian context. By analysing teachers' identity transition trajectory under the critical incident technique, novice EFL teachers are invited to articulate their narratives on becoming teachers, reflect on the decision-making and problem-solving process that they've engaged in their teaching practice, acknowledge the tensions and challenges encountered during their teaching careers, and evaluate the core values and beliefs that influenced their past and current practices (Farrell, 2013). Furthermore, by reflecting on those critical incidents, novice EFL teachers can internalize their practice and experience, as an experience will be meaningless and will not bring forth change if it is not critically internalized (Curtis et al., 2015). Moreover, the results of this research would also shed light on how novice EFL teachers mediate the tensions that they encountered and reformed a more robust professional identity from pre-service to novice to eventually prevent teacher attrition. Thus, to fill the gap in the literature, the researcher formulated two research questions as follows:

1. What imagined professional identity do the EFL teachers have in the pre-service stage?
2. How do the EFL teachers mediate the tensions by transforming their imagined identity in the pre-service stage to a designated identity in the novice stage?

## Method

As the study aimed to explore the ways novice EFL teachers negotiated the tensions encountered during their early careers to transform their professional identity, a critical incident technique was employed. Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a qualitative approach that provides clear step-by-step guidelines to gather and analyse the data related to human behaviours and real-life experiences along with the significance or impact on the people involved as the turning point (Hughes, 2007). This technique was suitable to facilitate the participants to freely tell their stories, critically reflect on their critical incidents along with their emotions, and deeply cultivate the lessons to strengthen their professional identity. As Farrell (2013) asserted that "by telling their stories, teachers can not only reflect on specific

incidents within their teaching world but also feel a sense of cathartic relief and it offers an outlet for tensions, feelings and frustrations about teaching" (p. 81).

Eight novice EFL teachers from different schools were chosen through the purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling method refers to a nonprobability sampling technique where the researcher uses personal purposes and judgments to opt for the subjects considered to be representative of the population (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010) There are two considerations in choosing the eight participants. First, the eight participants met the criteria to be regarded as novice teachers with "less than three years of full-time teaching experience" (Jiang et al., 2021, p.1). Second, they taught in different schools in different cities in Indonesia. The reason was to ensure the variety of critical incidents experienced by those teachers in various educational contexts and settings.

*Table 1. Participants' Demographic Data*

<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Years of Teaching</b>
Yohan	Male	Vocational	Yogyakarta	8 months
Sierra	Female	Vocational	Jakarta	8 months
Erika	Female	Senior High	Kalimantan	9 months
Allen	Male	Elementary	Kalimantan	1 year
Anna	Female	Elementary	Cirebon	2 years
Yasmine	Female	Elementary	Yogyakarta	2 years
Ciara	Female	Elementary	Yogyakarta	2 years
Diana	Female	Elementary	Jakarta	2 years

To gather the data, the researcher utilized an open-ended questionnaire and individual in-depth interviews as the data collection techniques. Jiang et al. (2021) argued that some of the most preferred data gathering techniques for the study of critical incidents are individual in-depth interviews and reflection prompts. In this study, the open-ended questionnaire encompassing a series of retrospective questions was administered to investigate participants' imagined identity when they were in the pre-service stage. The open-ended questionnaire was adapted from Jiang et al. (2021) and Xu (2013). Meanwhile, ten guided questions for an individual in-depth interview were adapted from Farrell (2013) and Megawati, Mukminatien, Anugerahwati, Indrayani, & Unsiah (2020). The in-depth interview attempted to explore the tensions and conflicts experienced by the participants and the significance of those experiences to transform their professional identity.

*Table 2. Instrument Blueprint*

<b>Instruments</b>	<b>Aspects</b>	<b>Items</b>
Open-ended questionnaire	Imagined Identity in the pre-service stage (Jiang et al., 2021; Xu, 2013).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Things that motivated the participants to choose the English study program</li> <li>2. The reasons why the participants chose teaching as their profession</li> <li>3. The kind of teacher they wished to become</li> <li>4. People that inspired them in choosing the profession</li> <li>5. Their prior beliefs and expectations about teaching and learning before entering the real workforce</li> </ol>

Instruments	Aspects	Items
In-depth Interview	Designated identity after becoming novice teachers (Farrell, 2013; Megawati et al., 2020)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The most unpredictable and memorable incidents either positive or negative during their early teaching careers</li> <li>2. Their feelings and emotions during the critical incidents</li> <li>3. Their reactions to those incidents</li> <li>4. Things that they can learn from those critical incidents and how those incidents contributed to transforming their identity.</li> <li>5. Their new designated identity after experiencing various tensions and challenges.</li> </ol>

To collect and analyse the data, the researcher followed the step-by-step guideline of the critical incident technique proposed by Flanagan (1954). The diagram of the critical incident process is provided below.

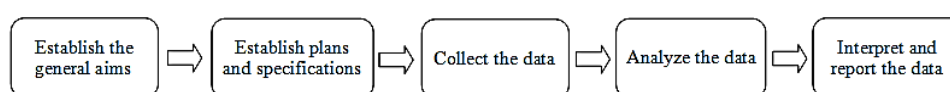


Figure 1. CIT Diagram adopted from Flanagan (1954)

The general aim of this study was to investigate how novice EFL teachers negotiated the tensions encountered during their early careers as critical incidents and the impacts of those incidents on transforming teachers' professional identity. After establishing the general aim, the researcher made specific plans concerning the participants of the study, data gathering techniques, and the instruments to gather the data. After the participants have agreed to participate in the study by filling out the consent form, the researcher gave an open-ended questionnaire containing some reflective questions to ponder and reflect on concerning their imagined identity when they were still pre-service teachers. This process involved sequential data collection and analysis in which the results of the open-ended questionnaire were used as the building block to continue the next procedure.

The following week, the researcher invited the participants to undertake an in-depth interview to share their critical incidents and engage in the meaning-making process to understand how those critical incidents transformed their imagined identity into the new designated identity. Due to the distance and pandemic situation, the interviews were conducted virtually by utilizing the Zoom video conference platform. Furthermore, the recordings of the in-depth interview were transcribed verbatim. To analyse the participants' imagined identity, the researcher utilized Xu's (2013) imagined professional identity framework. The framework consists of three main categories: (1) teacher as a language expert, (2) teacher as a facilitator, and (3) teacher as a moral guide. From the open-ended questionnaire triangulated with the in-depth interview results, the researcher employed a coding system by identifying, coding, and interpreting the emergent salient themes to eventually report the data (Creswell, 2002). For data presentation, the participants' responses from the open-ended questions were labelled OEQ (Open-ended questions). Meanwhile, for interview results, the data were labelled SSI (Semi-structured interview). To ensure validity, member checking was conducted by sending the final report of major findings and salient themes found from the interview to each participant through email (Creswell, 2002).

## Results & Discussion

This section discusses the two themes from the research questions, namely (1) participants' imagined professional identity in the pre-service stage which encompasses their beliefs and expectations of teaching-learning before entering the real workforce; and (2) their designated identity formed after encountering various critical incidents in the novice stage.

### Participants' Imagined Professional Identity in the Pre-Service Stage

From the data, three salient themes were identified under Xu's (2013) Framework of Imagined Professional Identity which encompassed three categories, namely teacher as a facilitator, teacher as a language expert, and teacher as a moral guide.

#### **A. Teacher as a Facilitator**

The teacher as a facilitator emerges from the conception that teaching is more than just applying some techniques to deliver the subject matter. It focuses on how the teachers can facilitate the dynamic learning process through meaningful interaction in the classroom and assist the students in optimizing their potential to eventually achieve success as the ultimate goal (Xu, 2013). In this study, four participants (Sierra, Erika, Yohan, and Ciara) revealed that becoming a facilitator was their dominant imagined identity in the pre-service stage. Two of them were shown in the following excerpts

*"I always want to be a teacher who can 'mingle' and 'blend' well with the students to be their good partner and companion. More or less, a friendly and cool teacher who can engage the students to learn English in fun ways" (Sierra/ OEQ)*

*"I want to be a dynamic teacher who teaches the students in more flexible ways. Of course, I will focus on how to deliver the materials effectively by facilitating meaningful classroom activities, but the most important thing is that I want to have a good relationship with my students" (Erika/ OEQ)*

From the two excerpts above, it was obvious that their main concerns in teaching-learning were becoming good partners with their students and facilitating meaningful classroom activities. In the participants' imagination, teaching was more on providing supportive and ideal conditions in which the students could learn better. By building a good relationship with the students and providing meaningful activities, positive emotions could emerge during the process and learning was most likely to occur (Yang et al., 2021). This finding was in line with the study conducted by Iswandari (2017) in which the pre-service teachers' main belief about teaching and learning was to facilitate and support their future students' growth by putting the learner at the centre of the teaching-learning process

#### **B. Teacher as a Language Expert**

The teacher as a language expert refers to teachers' level of language proficiency and their ability to deliver the materials using good techniques and methods (Xu, 2013). From the reflection, it was found that one participant highlighted good content knowledge and pedagogical skills as the two most important qualities that a language teacher should possess. It was evident in the following excerpt:

*"I want to be a competent English teacher who becomes an expert in my field. I also want to become a well-structured and well-prepared teacher but not too rigid. It means that I can manage the classroom effectively, prepare the materials beforehand, and deliver the materials well" (Diana/ OEQ)*

Diana's imagined identity suggested that her ideal conception of a good teacher was to become a *language expert*. She believed that having good competence and proficiency in language and pedagogy was essential. This is because teaching the subject matter becomes one of the main responsibilities that she had as a teacher. However, she also realised that teaching involved a series of decision-making processes, and without having sufficient knowledge and skills, she would not be able to make informed decisions and actions that were well-suited for her students in the classroom. This view of teaching was in line with Pennington and Richards (2016) who argued an individual identity as an EFL language teacher is partially built upon a conception that as a language teacher, one should be proficient in the target language and should be able to have sufficient content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and communicative competence.

### **C. Teacher as a Moral Guide**

The teacher as a moral guide highlighted the teachers' role as educators who guide the students intellectually, morally, and spiritually to help them pursue their goals (Xu, 2013). In the current study, three participants (Anna, Allen, and Yasmine) showed their imagined identities as moral guides. Two of them stated as follows:

*"I once had a teacher who was really inspiring. He was willing to listen so that when the students encountered problems, we did not hesitate to come to him and tell him our problems. For me, he was a good role model.....I want to be a compassionate and inspiring teacher that can also be a good role model to my students." (Anna/ OEQ)*

From the excerpt above, it was apparent that Anna's imagined identity was influenced by her past experience as a student. She found a good role model that shaped her ideal imagination of what a good teacher is supposed to be. For her, becoming a good role model for her students by showing compassion was perceived as prominent. A similar response was recorded as stated below:

*"I want to be a teacher who does not only teach but also educates. There is a huge difference between those two words. Nowadays, students can learn a lot of things from the internet by themselves, but will the internet educate them?... I will educate them not only to be clever students but also decent human beings with good heart and compassion" (Allen/ OEQ)*

Allen's statement highlighted his imagined identity that becoming a teacher meant teaching and educating students at the same time. He realized that his role as a teacher included guiding his students both morally and spiritually so that they could be decent human beings with good hearts and compassion.

### **Participants' Designated Identity in the Novice Stage**

The following section highlighted and discussed participants' designated identities constructed after they encountered a series of critical incidents during their professional careers. Four notable themes emerged as a result of the participants' meaning-making process, namely: teacher as an adaptive agent, becoming an authentic and genuine teacher,

teacher's sense of belonging within the community of practice, embracing teacher's vulnerability, and teacher as an autonomous life-long learner

### **A. Teacher as an Adaptive Agent**

Teaching is a dynamic process that is full of unpredictability, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Thus, the 'simplistic cause-effect' models of teaching are not sufficient to help us understand the complexity of the teaching-learning process (Wang, 2020). From the reflections, it was revealed that some participants were also struggling to deal with the uncertainty and unpredictability nature of teaching. Some of their stories were presented in the following excerpts:

*"When I first entered the school, everything was conducted virtually. I was forced by the situation to be creative and to learn how to utilize technology to create engaging, effective and meaningful classroom activities. I also realized that in this situation, the lesson plan that I have made beforehand could not help me entirely since there were always unexpected things that happened during online learning such as unstable internet connection, disinterested students, and incompatible devices. I was overwhelmed at first, but then I learn to be more flexible" (Yasmine/SSI)*

From the reflection, Yasmine encountered difficulty in adapting herself to the new mode of teaching delivery. Even though Yasmine was quite tech-savvy, she struggled to utilize and design engaging, effective, and meaningful classroom activities in her online class. Despite the challenges that she faced, she chose to learn and upgrade herself. In this situation, Yasmine's agency enabled her to actively execute actions in the face of adversity to overcome the tensions. This is in line with Hong, Francis, and Schutz (2018) who argued that individual teachers, as active agents, can make choices and act on those choices within any given set of contextual constraints. Another similar critical incident was also encountered by Allen as he stated:

*"Some students had difficulty in keeping up with the lesson and academic demand due to online learning during the pandemic. When the school reopened and the students went back to school, some teachers including me realized that the students had difficulty keeping up with the lesson and became less discipline..... I was frustrated yes, but I chose to gradually change my approach to teaching. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't" (Allen/SSI)*

Allen's story was corroborated by the study conducted by Engzell, Frey, and Verhagen (2021) which revealed that many students worldwide experienced learning loss due to school closure during the pandemic. Responding to this situation, Allen determined to change his approach to teaching and tried to find which approach worked best for his students. His agency enabled him to actively adjust himself and evaluate his practice. In conclusion, the two critical incidents above pinpoint the role of teachers' agency to continuously transform and reform the participants' identity in the face of tensions and difficulties.

### **B. Becoming an Authentic and Genuine Teacher**

The emotion or 'affective' dimension is undeniably inseparable in the realm of teaching-learning. A previous study showed that teachers' ability to manage and navigate their emotions and others' emotions, which emerged as a result of the complex interplay between external expectations and demands, were crucial in shaping their professional



identity (Schutz, Nichols, & Schwenke, 2018). This present study found that three participants (Erika, Sierra, and Anna) to some extent encountered difficulty dealing with the affective dimension of teaching. Some of their stories were presented in the following excerpts:

*"During the online learning, I struggled a lot to teach those students because every time I teach the attendance of the online class was very low. Of 25 students in total, there were only around 15 students who joined my class. I was also a new teacher so they did not really listen to me and they chose to turn off the zoom camera during the lesson. It was frustrating and demotivating for me" (Sierra/SSI)*

From the interview, Sierra further elaborated that her frustration led her to question her decision to be a teacher in a private vocational high school. However, as the school reopened, she found out that during the pandemic many of her students chose to juggle between work and school due to the financial condition of their families. This changed her perception of those 'misbehaved' students. She then showed the capacity for professional empathy by providing more time and giving more effort to help the students with learning difficulties since she knew that her students were not 'lazy' or 'misbehaved'. She mentioned:

*"I started to make some strategies to fully engage them in learning. I used some games to engage and deliver the materials. I found it more effective than just delivering materials using PPT. I also tried to relate the materials to their lives..... For those 'misbehaved' students, I tried to make a personal approach by showing my sincerity to let them know that I care for them and I want them to be better" (Sierra/SSI)*

She further explained that now she felt emotionally connected with her students as they interacted and showed their genuine emotions. Furthermore, the way she gradually built rapport with her students made her change her perception of teaching as emotional work as opposed to emotional labour. This was also highlighted by Day (2018) who argued that to see teaching as emotional work, teachers are required to "invest their authentic selves in understanding others, to feel their feelings as part of their own, and in doing so to build and sustain authentic relations of care" (p. 65).

### **C. Teacher's Sense of Belonging within the Community of Practice**

Teachers' identity is constructed and transformed as they participate and interact with the students, parents, educational authorities, and other teachers within the community of practice (Jiang et al., 2021). However, teachers' beliefs and expectations sometimes contradict the culture, beliefs, policy and demands of the institution in which they work (Wang, 2020). This is in line with the present study in which four participants (Erika, Ciara, Anna, and Yasmine) mentioned their struggles in adjusting and adapting themselves to the institution's culture, parents' expectations, and government policy that sometimes contradicted one another. These conflicts and tensions, if not critically reflected, can weaken teachers' sense of belonging and professional identity. Furthermore, when the participants were interviewed, they never expected that the quality of interaction that they had within the community of practice could hugely impact the way they perceived their professions. Some of their stories were presented as follows:

*"The thing that I always worried about was not how to deliver the materials, but how to build and maintain a good relationship with the parents. Our motto in that school is making sure all students and parents are properly treated and facilitated. However, as time goes by, this positivity becomes 'toxic positivity' since the teachers do not have the freedom to make decisions and express themselves. The*

*teachers need to constantly impress and follow what the parents expect and demand. This made the teachers to some extent lose their authority and integrity. I remember one moment in the early of the semester when we had to revise and change the whole class schedule and materials since according to the students' and parents' opinions, they were not suitable and good enough for them. At that moment, I realized and learned that the school and teachers needed to have authority and integrity and those two things should not be sacrificed for the sake of satisfying the parents and the students. Parents should be perceived as the teachers' partners, not controllers" (Erika/SSI)*

The critical incidents that Erika had as a result of interacting with the parents made her realize the notions of authority and integrity that became an integral part of her professional identity. When the teachers did not have the authority and the freedom to make a decision in their practice and when the parents over-dominate their involvement, the teachers' sense of belonging to the profession would weaken (Song, 2016). The unpleasant experience was also faced by Yasmine when she interacted with her principal. She stated:

*"My principal is overly critical for the things that are not really necessary. I am actually open to critics, but she always blames the teachers for making small mistakes. She is also aloof and tends to create a huge gap between her and the teachers. I do not feel comfortable working with her since she tends to favour some teachers over others..... But I learn that one day if I become a leader, I will make sure to build a good relationship with my colleagues" (Yasmine/SSI)*

Yasmine's story reflected her reluctance in interacting with her principal due to the gap in power and positionality between her and her principal. Those critical incidents mentioned above pinpoint the role of the community of practice in shaping teachers' identity. This was concurrent with Flores and Day's (2006) finding which revealed that teachers who worked in a school with informative and encouraging leadership and supportive working relationship amongst the community members were more likely to have a positive view of their profession and a strong sense of belonging that made them remain in their profession.

#### **D. Embracing Teacher's Vulnerability**

One of the most notable teacher professional identity construction deals with balancing teachers' authority and vulnerability (Alsup, 2018). Teachers to some extent hold the position as the authority figures who are responsible for making up decisions, managing the classroom, and delivering the materials. However, the teachers should also realize that they are human beings with personal subjectivity, goals, expectations, weaknesses, and limitations. Teachers' ability to deal with their vulnerability contributes to their pedagogical and self-transformation which eventually affects their professional identity development (Song, 2016). From the reflections, it was revealed that the participants also learned how to balance authority and vulnerability through encountering a series of critical incidents in their classroom practice. Some of their stories were presented below:

*"There is one student who is very excellent and smart. One day he complained about the ways I delivered the materials and the mistakes that I made when explaining the material. At that time I was embarrassed and this reduced my self-efficacy in teaching, but then as time went by I used that experience to motivate me to learn more. I am aware that as a teacher I might not know all the things and I should allow myself to learn a lot of new things even from my students" (Erika/SSI)*

A similar experience was also encountered by Yohan he stated:

*"At one moment, I made a mistake in pronouncing some words. I forget what the exact words were, but one student corrected my mispronunciation in front of the whole students in class. I was*

*embarrassed at that time. However, I realized that I am not a know-it-all teacher so I need to humbly admit my mistake and learn more” (Yohan)*

From the two excerpts above, Erika and Yohan’s critical incidents dealing with their vulnerability at first challenged their authority and their competence as teachers. As teachers, they had the prior belief that they should be able to deliver the materials well, thus mistakes should be avoided by any means. However, they gradually admitted that they also had some flaws and they may not know more than their students. This enabled them to grow intellectually and emotionally as teachers. Song (2016) argued that embracing vulnerability enables the teachers to engage in ‘critical teaching’ that leads to pedagogical transformation and positive attitudes towards teaching. This notion is crucial in strengthening teachers’ professional identity.

### ***E. Teacher as an Autonomous Lifelong Learner***

As the dynamics of education keep shifting and the demands to prepare the students with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies have intensified, more sophisticated and complex ways of teaching are highly required (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). This urges the teachers to continuously develop their professionalism by refining and improving their teaching practice, knowledge, and pedagogy to meet the intended demand. In this study, the participant's awareness of the importance of teacher professional development was reflected in the following excerpts:

*“Since this school belongs to a big foundation, so every week there is always a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted virtually with the teachers from different schools under the foundation. Through this meeting, I can learn a lot of new things from the experts that facilitated the meeting such as a new online platform that can be utilized in the English classroom, interactive teaching methods, effective classroom management, etc. This kind of meeting helps me to improve my competence and pedagogy in teaching” (Erika/SSI)*

Erika’s story suggested her need to constantly improve and update herself with new knowledge and skills to keep up with the ever-changing nature of education. Developing and increasing teachers’ quality and professionalism are perceived as paramount and consequential since teachers are regarded to have “value-added impacts” on students’ learning and outcomes (Utami, 2018, p.1). Surprisingly, all participants mentioned their desire to continue their studies and pursue a master’s degree. They realized that the knowledge and skills that they obtained during their study at the undergraduate level were not sufficient to equip them in facing the dynamics of education in the future. This finding also shed light on the role of metacognitive skills that enabled them to become cognizant of their current knowledge and have the awareness to continuously learn and develop themselves (Çakıcı, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to reveal novice EFL teachers’ identity in the pre-service stage and the ways they negotiated the tensions encountered during their early careers to transform their professional identity. The current findings suggested that (1) the teacher as a facilitator became the most dominant imagined professional identity held by the participants in the pre-service stage followed by (2) the teacher as a moral guide and (3) the teacher as a

language expert. This indicated that the participants' beliefs and convictions of teaching have shifted from the more traditional approach which heavily emphasized teachers' full control in the classroom into recognition of the self-initiated learning approach, where teachers' main role was facilitating learning. Furthermore, this study also suggested that the participants' designated identity in the novice stage has developed and transformed into more nuanced and complex compared to their prior imagined identity in the pre-service stage. The participants' designated identities are of five elements: (1) the teacher as an adaptive agent, (2) becoming an authentic and genuine teacher, (3) the teacher's sense of belonging within the community of practice, and (4) embracing teacher's vulnerability, and (5) teacher as an autonomous lifelong learner.

Some implications can be drawn from this study. First, it sheds light on the importance of helping the pre-service teachers to understand their imagined identity so that when there is a mismatch between their idealized perceptions of the profession and the reality in their practice, they can mediate the tensions by transforming their identity to avoid the identity crisis. Second, it pinpoints the power of analysing teacher identity transformation under critical incident techniques as the participants can critically reflect on their critical incidents along with their emotions, and deeply cultivate the lessons to strengthen their professional identity. However, some limitations are unavoidable in this study as it relied on participants' retrospective memories to reveal their imagined identity in the pre-service stage. Thus, a longitudinal study is highly recommended to see the participants' gradual identity transformation from the pre-service stage to the novice stage and explore the influence of those transformations on their classroom practice

## References

- Alsop, J. (2008). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410617286>
- Alsop, J. (2018). Teacher identity discourse as identity growth: Stories of authority and vulnerability. In P. A. Schutz et al. (eds.) *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations* (pp. 13–23). West Lafayette: Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3_2)
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Sorensen, C. (2010). *Introduction to research in education* (8th ed). Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Çakıcı, D. (2018). Metacognitive awareness and critical thinking abilities of pre-service EFL teachers. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(5), 116–129.  
<https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n5p116>
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative* (4th ed). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Curtis, E., Wikaire, E., Kool, B., Honey, M., Kelly, F., & Poole, P. (2015). What helps and hinders indigenous student success in higher education health programmes: A qualitative study using the critical incident technique. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 34(3), 486–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.973378>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

- Day, C. (2018). Professional identity matters: Agency, emotions, and resilience. In P. A. Schutz et al. (eds.) *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations* (pp. 61–70). Nottingham: Springer International Publishing.
- Diasti, K. S. (2021). Constructing professional identity: Investigating stress factors and resilience experienced by EFL novice teachers. *Scholaria: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 11(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.24246/j.js.2021.v11.i1.p1-10>
- Engzell, P., Frey, A., & Verhagen, M. D. (2021). Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. <https://doi.org/10.1073/PNAS.2022376118>
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2013). Critical incident analysis through narrative reflective practice: A case study. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1(1), 79–89.
- Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51(4), 327–358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0061470>
- Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(2), 219–232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.09.002>
- Hong, J., Cross Francis, D., & Schutz, P. A. (2018). Research on teacher identity: Common themes, implications, and future directions. In P. A. Schutz et al. (eds.) *Research on Teacher Identity* (pp. 243–251). San Antonio, TX: Springer, Champ. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3_21)
- Hong, J., Day, C., & Greene, B. (2018). The construction of early career teachers' identities: Coping or managing? *Teacher Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2017.1403367>
- Hughes, H. (2007). Exploring methods in information literacy research. In Lipu, Suzanne, (ed) *Exploring Methods in Information Literacy Research* (pp. 49–66). Wagga Wagga: Charles Sturt University press. <https://doi.org/10.1533/9781780634128>
- Iswandari, Y. (2017). Revealing pre-service foreign language teachers' imagined professional identity in reflective journals. *Language and Language Teaching Journal*, 20(01), 59–67. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.2017.200107>
- Jiang, L., Yuan, K., & Yu, S. (2021). Transitioning from pre-service to novice: A study on Macau EFL teachers' identity change. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 30(1), 11–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-020-00510-4>
- Lomi, A. N. ke, & Mbato, C. L. (2020). Struggles and strategies in constructing professional identity: The first-year teaching experiences of Indonesian EFL novice teachers. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 4(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.33369/jeet.4.1.1-19>
- Megawati, F., Mukminatien, N., Anugerahwati, M., Indrayani, N., & Unsiah, F. (2020). Critical incidents: Exploring EFL prospective teachers' teaching experiences. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 9(3), 943–954. <https://doi.org/10.12973/EU-JER.9.3.943>
- Palmér, H. (2016). Professional primary school teacher identity development: A pursuit in line with an unexpressed image. *Teacher Development*, 20(5), 682–700. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2016.1202311>
- Palmer, P. J. (2003). The heart of a teacher: Identity and integrity in teaching. In *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (pp. 9–33). San Fransisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091389709602343>
- Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (2016). Teacher identity in language teaching: Integrating personal, contextual, and professional factors. *RELC Journal*, 47(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688216631219>

- Putri, A. R. D., & Kuswandono, P. (2020). The roles of critical incidents to construct public senior high school English teachers' identity. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 9(1), 47–60.
- Schutz, P. A., Nichols, S. L., & Schwenke, S. (2018). Critical events, emotional episodes, and teacher attributions in the development of teacher identities. In P. A. Schutz et al. (eds.) *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations* (pp. 49–60). San Antonio, TX: Springer, Champ. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3_5)
- Sfard, A., & Prusak, A. (2015). Telling identities: In search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity. *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), 14–22.
- Song, J. (2016). Emotions and language teacher identity: Conflicts, vulnerability, and transformation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 631–654. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.312>
- Sudtho, J., & Singhasiri, W. (2017). Exploring pre-service teachers' professional identity formation through the lens of critical incidents. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 43(99), 38–60.
- Tao, J., & Gao, X. (2017). Teacher agency and identity commitment in curricular reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 63, 346–355. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.010>
- Utami, I. G. A. L. P. (2018). *The alignment of perceptions and practices of effective English teaching by English teachers with different CPD involvement levels*. Unpublished Dissertation. Doctoral Program. Universitas Negeri Malang. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.15755.18725>
- Wang, P. (2020). Too many constraints: Five first-year EFL teachers' professional identity construction. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(2), 180–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1758662>
- Widiati, U., Suryati, N., & Hayati, N. (2018). Unraveling the challenges of Indonesian novice teachers of English. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(3), 621–629. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i3.9824>
- Wijaya, A. R. T., & Kuswandono, P. (2019). Reflecting critical incident as a form of English teachers' professional development: An Indonesian narrative inquiry research. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 5(2), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v5i2.10923>
- Wijaya, K. F. (2022). Investigating Indonesian novice EFL teachers' perceptions on their identity construction. *Scholaria: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 12(1), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.24246/j.js.2022.v12.i1.p9-19>
- Xu, H. (2013). From the imagined to the practiced: A case study on novice EFL teachers' professional identity change in China. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 31(1), 79–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.01.006>
- Xu, J., & Fan, Y. (2017). The evolution of the college English curriculum in China (1985–2015): Changes, trends and conflicts. *Language Policy*, 16(3), 267–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-016-9407-1>
- Yang, S., Shu, D., & Yin, H. (2021). Frustration drives me to grow: Unraveling EFL teachers' emotional trajectory interacting with identity development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103420>

